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Office of the Press Secretary
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**REMARKS BY PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA
AND PRESIDENT BRONISLAW KOMOROWSKI OF POLAND
IN JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE**

Belweder Palace
Warsaw, Poland

12:25 P.M. CET

PRESIDENT KOMOROWSKI: (As interpreted.) Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, it really is a great joy and a great satisfaction for me to be able to host the President of the United States to Poland on the 25th anniversary of regaining freedom by us.

It is also a great satisfaction and a great hope to host the President of the United States of America in a situation when with concern we are watching the crisis situation developing across the eastern border of Poland and across the eastern border of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, across the eastern border of the European Union in Ukraine.

That is why I am so glad that this meeting, that these talks signify also the reassurances of the security guarantees of this region of Europe. And they also signify the joint aspiration to strengthen the roles and the significance and the strength of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. I'm also very satisfied to be able to know that actually in all the areas that have been raised during our conversation, we are on the same page fully, and we also have full understanding of our intentions.

I would like to stress the Polish satisfaction that the President of the United States of America speaks in a very clear voice about the necessity to strengthen the role of the Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. Poland has been really making efforts to get this. And here and now, I would like to thank very much for the engagement of the United States in the actions to confirm in practice the declarations on the significance of NATO under the Washington Treaty for the security of Poland and the whole region -- I mean here also other countries that are located along the eastern flank of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

I also wish to stress that it is our common concern that, at the Wales summit, of NATO to reconfirm the need for the greater engagement of NATO in the development of infrastructure that would facilitate the reception of the reinforcement forces in case of threat.

I also fully appreciate that we are of the same opinion as far as the need of the update and the continuous exercises of the armed forces from the perspective of the contingency plans is concerned. I also would like to stress that we are also of absolutely the same opinion about the necessity to increase our financial efforts to fund armed forces by the member states of NATO.

That is why I would like to inform you, ladies and gentlemen, that together with the government -- because this is something that we agreed with the government -- I submitted to President Obama also, the Polish will to make a gesture backed with a very tangible value in terms of increasing the level of our own engagement in the shaping of the defense budget. It is also about making a gesture to encourage other member states of NATO to follow the same way -- because other countries in the neighborhood of Poland are raising very significantly their defense budgets.

Poland -- and I will recommend this to the government, I will recommend this to the parliament pretty soon -- Poland intends to increase the defense budget of our armed forces -- Poland is going to increase the funding of the modernization of the Polish armed forces up to the level of 2 percent of the GDP. And it means that is very tangible, very clear engagement at the level that refers to what we talked about in the early 2000s. And now in the result of economic growth, which is our current situation, and it is going to continue and it means that it is a very serious source of funding of the Polish armed forces as more and more significant complement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization capabilities.

I also would like very much raising important questions like energy security. I wish to tell you that this conversation is going to be continued. This conversation is very important for Poland and we are going to continue to talk about it during the meeting of the President, myself, with other Presidents from our region of Central and Eastern Europe. President Obama, together with me, will be the co-hosts of this meeting. We will talk about security and we will also talk about other important aspects of the functioning of NATO nations. Those nations, together with Poland, regained their independence 25 years ago. We will talk about our Polish freedom regained then can be strengthened and secured from the potential risks.

Thank you.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Dzień dobry. Thank you, President Komorowski. To you and the Polish people, I want to thank you for welcoming me back to Poland today and it is an honor to be here to celebrate 25 years of freedom.

Mr. President, on my last visit to Warsaw, you said that "dreams come true when, apart from dreams, we have courage and determination." And thanks to the courage and determination of you and so many Poles displayed over the decades, the idea of a free and democratic and prosperous Poland is not a dream anymore, it is a reality.

Obviously the American people have deep connections to Poland. My hometown of Chicago has especially deep connections to Poland. And it makes it that much more special for me to be a part of this moment. And I also want to thank you for welcoming me on the eve of your birthday, so let me say -- Cto lat!

I've come here, first and foremost, to reaffirm the enduring commitment of the United States to the security of Poland. As NATO allies, we have an Article 5 duty to our collective defense. As President, I've made sure that the United States is upholding that commitment. We're on track with our missile defense program, including interceptor sites here

in Poland. As we saw this morning, our American aviation detachment here is the first regular presence of U.S. forces in Poland. We continuously rotate additional personnel and aircrafts into Poland and the Baltics. And I want to commend Poland for its contributions to the NATO air patrols over the Baltics.

Today, I'm announcing a new initiative to bolster the security of our NATO allies here in Europe. Under this effort, and with the support of Congress, the United States will pre-position more equipment in Europe. We will be expanding our exercises and training with allies to increase the readiness of our forces. And I know President Komorowski is a great champion of the effort to modernize the Polish military and we welcome the announcement that he just made about an even greater commitment.

We'll increase the number of American personnel -- Army and Air Force units -- continuously rotating through allied countries in Central and Eastern Europe. And we will be stepping up our partnerships with friends like Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia as they provide for their own defense. I'm calling on Congress to approve up to \$1 billion to support this effort, which will be a powerful demonstration of America's unshakeable commitment to our NATO allies.

Poland, to its credit, is a leader in the alliance when it comes to investing in our collective defense. We've seen that again today. Poland's resolve -- and the initiative I'm proposing today -- is a reminder that every ally needs to carry their share and truly invest in the capabilities of the alliance that are needed for the future.

Of course, President Komorowski and I focused mostly on the situation in Ukraine. And perhaps because Poles know better than most how precious freedom truly is, Poland and your President have displayed outstanding leadership in recent months.

We agree that further Russian provocation will be met with further costs for Russia, including, if necessary, additional sanctions. Russia has a responsibility to engage constructively with the Ukrainian government in Kyiv, to prevent the flow of militants and weapons into eastern Ukraine. Russia also needs to be using its influence with armed separatists to convince them to stop attacking Ukrainian security forces, leave buildings that they've seized, lay down their arms and enter into the political process.

Meanwhile, the United States and Poland will continue to support Ukrainians as they embark on political and economic reforms. We're prepared to help facilitate a dialogue between the Ukrainian government and representatives of separatist regions. And I look forward to discussing all this with President-elect Poroshenko tomorrow.

Finally, President Komorowski and I discussed a range of issues critical to our shared prosperity, including the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, which would boost trade between the United States and Europe, including facilitating potential energy exports from the United States into Europe. We agreed that there are more steps that can be taken to diversify Europe's energy sources. That's important not only for Europe's economy, but also for its security. And that's a topic that I'll focus on later today when we meet with other Central and Eastern European Presidents.

So, thank you, Mr. President, again for your partnership and your hospitality. I could not be more grateful to have the opportunity to join tomorrow's celebration in Castle Square and a chance to address the Polish people. Dziękuję.

Q The question for both Presidents -- how will the situation in Ukraine influence the change of the relation between NATO and Russia? And what assurance will President-elect Poroshenko hear from both of you? Both of you are going to talk with him.

PRESIDENT KOMOROWSKI: (As interpreted.) First of all, I would like to thank very much for the birthday wishes. It undoubtedly is thanks to my mom and not myself. But I want to thank you very much for that.

One thing is certain -- that it is -- the merit of the whole nation of Poland is Polish freedom, Polish freedom that was regained on the 4th of June, 1989.

Answering your question about NATO-Russia relations, I can tell you that the Western world -- including Poland, and I'm sure it goes for all other countries of NATO -- everyone is very much interested in developing as good relations with Russia as possible, and as good cooperation as possible. Poland is also very much interested in the continuation of this uneasy process of the reconciliation beyond difficult history and painful history and bloody history.

However, to make sure that this cooperation, this reconciliation could really function also between NATO and Russia, it is absolutely necessary today, though, for Russia to totally give up the application of violence in conduct with its neighbors. It is also necessary for Russia to give up similar intentions towards other countries that are in the neighborhood of Russia, including those countries that aren't members of the alliance.

That is why what we would like to see is the full reconfirmation of the will to cooperate with Ukraine -- free and independent Ukraine. What we expect is the reconfirmation of acceptance or full understanding of the result of the presidential elections in Ukraine. And we also are looking forward to the talks about developing good relations between Russia and Ukraine.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Well, I thoroughly agree with your President about the importance of maintaining good relations with Russia, but not sacrificing principle in pursuit of good relations.

The fact of the matter is, is that Russia is a significant country with incredibly gifted people, resources, an enormous land mass, and they rightfully play an important role on the world stage and in the region. But what we have learned from our history -- and nobody understands that better than the Poles -- is that basic principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty and freedom, the ability for people to make their own determinations about their country's future is the cornerstone of the peace and security that we've seen in Europe over the last several decades. And that is threatened by Russian actions in Crimea, and now Russian activity in eastern Ukraine.

So we have said consistently that not only do we seek good relations with Russia, but we expect Ukraine to have strong relations with Russia. We don't believe that Ukraine has to choose between good relations with Europe and good relations with Russia. We do think that Ukrainians should make their own decisions about the future of their country without meddling, interference, or armed militias being financed from the outside trying to disrupt the effort of Ukrainians to reform themselves, to strengthen their democracy, and to improve their economy.

And, as a consequence, we will continue to support Ukrainian efforts. The fact that there has been an election on May 25th and we have now a President-elect I think gives us some momentum to build on as we move forward. The President-elect of Ukraine has indicated his willingness to work with all regions of Ukraine to create a constitutional order that is representative of all people. And he has said that he is interested in pursuing good relations with Russia. But what he has said, and he is right to say, is that the sovereignty of Ukraine should not be sacrificed in that effort, and we fully support him in that.

And NATO's relationship with Russia I think will be one in which, if Russia is observing basic international law and principles, there should be cooperation between Russia and NATO; where Russia violates international law and international principle, NATO will stand firm in asserting those principles.

Q Thank you. I wanted to ask you if you have learned more about the circumstances of Sergeant Bergdahl's capture, and whether he could be facing punishment given that the Pentagon has concluded that he left his unit? Also, could you respond to congressional Republicans who say that you violated the law by not notifying them 30 days in advance and that the release or the transfer of the Taliban prisoners could put Americans at risk? Did your willingness to go around that 30-day requirement signal a new urgency to close Guantanamo now that you're ending combat operations in Afghanistan?

And also, President Komorowski, can you say whether the steps that President Obama outlined today to increase the U.S. military presence here in Europe are enough to mitigate whatever threat you see coming from Russia, or do you want more from the United States?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: The United States has always had a pretty sacred rule, and that is we don't leave our men or women in uniform behind. And that dates back to the earliest days of our revolution.

We have consulted with Congress for quite some time about the possibility that we might need to execute a prisoner exchange in order to recover Sergeant Bergdahl. We saw an opportunity. We were concerned about Sergeant Bergdahl's health. We had the cooperation of the Qataris to execute an exchange, and we seized that opportunity. And the process was truncated because we wanted to make sure that we did not miss that window.

With respect to the circumstances of Sergeant Bergdahl's capture by the Taliban, we obviously have not been interrogating Sergeant Bergdahl. He is recovering from five years of captivity with the Taliban. He's having to undergo a whole battery of tests, and he is going to have to undergo a significant transition back into life. He has not even met with his family yet,

which indicates I think the degree to which we take this transition process seriously -- something that we learned from the Vietnam era.

But let me just make a very simple point here, and that is, regardless of the circumstances, whatever those circumstances may turn out to be, we still get an American soldier back if he's held in captivity. Period. Full stop. We don't condition that. And that's what every mom and dad who sees a son or daughter sent over into war theater should expect from not just their Commander-in-Chief but the United States of America.

In terms of potential threats, the release of the Taliban who were being held in Guantanamo was conditioned on the Qataris keeping eyes on them and creating a structure in which we can monitor their activities. We will be keeping eyes on them. Is there the possibility of some of them trying to return to activities that are detrimental to us? Absolutely. That's been true of all the prisoners that were released from Guantanamo. There's a certain recidivism rate that takes place. I wouldn't be doing it if I thought that it was contrary to American national security. And we have confidence that we will be in a position to go after them if, in fact, they are engaging in activities that threaten our defenses.

But this is what happens at the end of wars. That was true for George Washington; that was true for Abraham Lincoln; that was true for FDR; that's been true of every combat situation -- that at some point, you make sure that you try to get your folks back. And that's the right thing to do.

Q Could Sergeant Bergdahl face -- (inaudible.)

PRESIDENT OBAMA: That's not something that we're discussing at this point because our main priority is making sure that the transition that he's undergoing after five years of captivity is successful.

PRESIDENT KOMOROWSKI: (As interpreted.) I would like to answer your question. Certainly, for us, the decisions of the American authorities to increase its presence in the Eastern countries of NATO are very important. We welcome them with great hope. And we welcome these decisions as an announcement of a true return of NATO to focusing very strongly on questions that are connected at the foundations of the alliance, which is Article 5 of the Washington Treaty that refers to the collective defense -- the defense on the basis of solidarity of the territories, the homelands of the member states.

We are absolutely convinced that this is a good response and it is important for the whole region, not only for Poland. It is an important response that will be analyzed and evaluated as a very important element of discouragement for Russia to continue the policy of pressure and aggression against the neighbors that are located to the east of our borders.

However, I am absolutely convinced that another element that is so important that also supplements the will that is expressed by President Obama to increase the presence of the American armed forces in Eastern Europe will be the engagement of NATO in the development of additional NATO infrastructure that is a prerequisite for the possible effective reception of the reinforcement forces. These two elements in my opinion create a situation of full

reconfirmation -- reaffirmation of the security of our region. And for this I would like to thank you.

Q A question of both Presidents. Referring to what has been raised a moment ago, this European reassurance initiative, it doesn't do away with the division into old and new members of the alliance. It doesn't mean that the deployment of ground troops of the United States, and Poland and other countries like the Baltic States counted on this very much. So what kind of American troops can we expect in Poland, specifically, within the next month or year? Is it going to be some complement of ground troops? And if so, when are they going to come?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: First of all, when you discuss old and new NATO members, I recall my first NATO meeting back in 2009, and I made very clear at that first meeting my belief that there's no such thing as new members of NATO and old members of NATO -- there are just members of NATO. And because that was my strong view then and continues to be my strong view now, I immediately pushed to make sure that we were putting in place contingency plans for every NATO member. And those contingency plans have been steadily developed over the last several years.

And part of what I think your President just indicated is very important is that our contingency plans are not just pieces of paper on a shelf, but we have the capacity to operationalize it. That means that there has to be resources pre-positioned; there has to be training; there have to be joint exercises. We have been conducting those, but there's no doubt that what has happened in Ukraine adds a sense of urgency when we meet in Wales in the next NATO summit.

And part of what I discussed with Secretary General of NATO Rasmussen and now with the new Secretary General Stoltenberg is the need to make sure that the collective defense effort is robust, it is ready, it is properly equipped.

That does mean that every NATO member has to do its fair share. Obviously, we all have different capacities. The United States is going to have different capacities than Poland; Poland is going to have a different capacity than Latvia. But everyone has the capacity to do their fair share, to do a proportional amount to make sure that we have the resources, the planning, the integration, the training in order to be effective.

Some of that has to do with where our personnel is positioned. And obviously, as I indicated before, my administration has put U.S. soldiers on Polish soil for the first time. This new initiative that I'm putting forward gives us the option, the capacity, to add to those rotations.

But I think it's important to recognize that the effectiveness of our defenses against any threat is not just going to be dependent on how many troops we have in any particular country -- it has to do with how we are working collectively together to make sure that when any NATO member is threatened, all of us can respond rapidly -- whether it's through air, sea, or land.

And that's going to require some flexibility. It's going to require some additional planning. It's going to require some joint capabilities that right now we don't have. But frankly, NATO is very reliant on U.S. capabilities but has not always invested in some joint

capabilities that would be important as well. And it's going to require every NATO member to step up. We have seen a decline steadily in European defense spending generally. There are exceptions -- like Poland, like Estonia -- but for the most part, we have seen a steady decline. That has to change.

The United States is proud to bear its share of the defense of the Transatlantic Alliance. It is the cornerstone of our security. But we can't do it alone. And we're going to need to make sure that everybody who is a member of NATO has full membership. They expect full membership when it comes to their defense; then that means that they've also got to make a contribution that is commensurate with full membership.

PRESIDENT KOMOROWSKI: (As interpreted.) For Poland, what is really fundamental is to make sure that nobody from outside of NATO claims the right to determine what NATO member states may do and what they may not do. And it also concerns the question of the presence of NATO troops and NATO infrastructure in the Polish territory.

What is most important for us is to make sure that there are no second-category member states of NATO, that there are no countries about whom an external country, a third country like Russia can say whether or not American or other allied troops can be deployed to these countries. That is why the decision of the United States of America to deploy American troops to Poland is really very important for us, both as an element of deterrence, but also as a reconfirmation that we do not really accept any limitations concerning the deployment of NATO troops to Poland imposed for some time or suggested for some time by a country that is not a member of NATO.

Another thing is the inadequacy of response for the existing situation, the Ukrainian crisis, the Russian behavior about Crimea, for example -- first, the necessary response to it. And this response is both the real presence of American troops, reinforced aviation detachment and then the ground troops that that would complement, as well as the declaration of President Obama to increase this presence even more. I would like to remind you that Poland is also making a contribution in the reconfirmation of an equal right of every member state to decide whether or not they are going to receive NATO troops in their territories.

Poland is participating in the air policing mission that is a mission to provide security for the air space over the Baltic States. We do this together with other allies from NATO and we don't ask anybody for acceptance except for what is agreed within NATO internally. The same goes for Poland's participation in the Afghan operation in ISAF. It was the reconfirmation of full solidarity and full core responsibility for the decisions which are made not only for the military effort but also for political decisions. Poland has been and shall continue to be a spokesperson for the solidarity within NATO. And this can be manifested also in the denial of the right of anyone from outside of NATO to decide whether we can do something or we cannot do it.

Q Mr. President, now that Ukraine has successfully elected its new President, can you talk to us about how much military assistance you are prepared to give Ukraine, either as part of this package or more broadly? And you spoke about the importance of not sacrificing principle in pursuit of good relations with Mr. Putin. You know Prime Minister Cameron and President Hollande will meet individually with Mr. Putin during this visit in France. Would you consider

doing the same under some circumstances, or do you think it's premature? And I think we're just interested in getting inside your mind. You'll see him at this lunch, at least probably shake hands. What do you want to say to him if you could?

If I may, also, President Komorowski, 25 years after the Solidarity election victory, are you concerned that Poland and the region are still vulnerable to a return to Russian dominance? And do you believe that President Putin actually wants to reconstitute the Soviet Union? Thank you.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Well, first of all, I'm looking forward to the chance to talk to the President-elect of Ukraine tomorrow. I want to hear from him what he thinks would be most helpful. My suspicion, based on the discussions that we've had intensively with Ukrainian officials over the last several months, is they're very interested in making sure that economic support is in place. They're very concerned about making sure that energy is in place as winter comes up.

The IMF package and the international assistance, including ours, that has been forthcoming is going to be critical I think in these early months of the new government's efforts to solidify its position and also to reach out to skeptics and say there's the prospect for a better life. But that has to translate into concrete action. And so we're going to spend a lot of time on the economics of Ukraine.

With respect to the defense of Ukraine, we have had a partnership with the Ukrainian military for quite some time. We have strong relations. The Ukrainian officers have been trained in the United States. During this crisis we have provided them nonlethal assistance that's been critical for them.

Part of what's going to be interesting to hear is the strategy to deal with eastern Ukraine in a way that is careful about civilian casualties but recognizes that we can't have a bunch of masked thugs creating chaos in a big chunk of your country, and that there has to be some mechanism to return law and order to many of these areas. And this is where Russian influence can be extraordinarily important.

Now, in terms of my relationship with Mr. Putin, I always had a businesslike relationship with Mr. Putin. Throughout this crisis, I have talked to Mr. Putin by phone. I've been very clear with him privately about the same principles that I lay out publicly: We are interested in good relations with Russia; we are not interested in threatening Russia. We recognize that Russia has legitimate interests in what happens along its borders and has a long historic relationship with Ukraine. But we also believe that the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty have to be respected, that Russia has violated them; that we are going to maintain sanctions that are directed at the annexation of Crimea and that we have prepared economic costs on Russia that can escalate if, in fact, we continue to see Russia actively destabilizing one of its neighbors in the way that we've seen of late.

And Mr. Putin has a choice to make. He can make a decision, that, having now begun to pull back his troops directly on the border, he also exerts his influence to get these separatist elements to stand down. He can meet with the President-elect of Ukraine, recognize that that

was a legitimate election, and help to facilitate the kind of dialogue along the Ukraine-Russian border that can calm the situation down and encourage people to participate in legitimate political process.

That's what I will tell him if I see him publicly. That's what I have told him privately. I would expect and hope that David Cameron and Francois Hollande would emphasize those same points to him when they meet with him. And if, in fact, we can see some responsible behavior by the Russians over the next several months, then I think it is possible for us to try to rebuild some of the trust that's been shattered during this past year.

But I think it is fair to say that rebuilding that trust will take quite some time. And in the meantime we are going to be prepared for any contingencies that may come up if, in fact, Mr. Putin continues to pursue strategies that destabilize its neighbors. Whether it's Ukraine, or any NATO member, or Moldova or others, we want to make sure that we stand with the people of countries that are simply seeking to choose their own destiny.

And I've said in the past and I will repeat again: I do not believe in spheres of influence. There are times where we have governments in the Western Hemisphere that are not particularly friendly to us and we may make very clear that we don't like their policies, but under my administration we don't go around and try to overthrow those governments, or to finance or supply armed efforts to undermine those governments. That's not what we do -- partly because we have enough confidence that we've got the better argument and ultimately governments that pursue oppressive policies, corrupt policies -- that over time those governments will fail because that's not the kind of government that's going to meet the aspirations of people.

Q And will you meet with President Putin on this trip --

PRESIDENT OBAMA: I'm sure I'll see him. He's going to be there. I think it's important for us to acknowledge the role that Russia played during World War II, and that's part of what Normandy is about.

All right? Okay.

PRESIDENT KOMOROWSKI: (As interpreted.) Well, ladies and gentlemen, it is difficult not to notice that something has changed to the east of the borders of NATO; that, again, we are heading toward the aggression with the use of armed forces against one's neighbor. A few years ago it was Georgia; now it is Ukraine, with a special focus on Crimea.

President Putin didn't hide -- he didn't hide that these were elements of the Russian armed forces, and this is something that we have to acknowledge -- just the same way Russia never hid that for the last four years it has increased its defense budget twofold. We, ourselves, have to ask the question, why? For what purpose? And what does it have to mean for member states of NATO?

All of us are interested in Russia to get modernized so that it is possible to do not only good business modernizing Russia, but also develop relations of good neighborhood and

cooperation in many dimensions, in many areas. But today we have to answer this situation that has come up by supporting independence of Ukraine and it tried to choose a pro-Western direction. We have to support the modernization of Ukraine, too.

I am convinced that this is the right way to develop the mechanism and the source of a very good and suggestive example for the Russian society, just as a great example for them was the development of democracy in Poland -- free market, prosperity, security, safety. It acted very well on Ukraine, and I am convinced that it was simply an element of the Ukrainian dream to follow along the same way, in the direction of the same values.

I am also convinced that the success of Ukraine, its democratic and independent nature, combined with overcoming the economic crisis and political crisis on the ground, combined with deep modernization of the Ukrainian society and state, will have a huge influence on the shaping of the attitudes of people within the Russian society. That is difficult not to notice today that the Russian public opinion has fully supported the aggressive behavior of President Putin in Crimea. The point is that public opinion in Russia could stand on the side of the prospects for the modernization of Russia, and not at the reconstitution of any zone of influence and any dreams of empire.

Ladies and gentlemen, this press conference is over. Thank you very much.